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Members in Discernment from the SEC Gather in Cleveland to Experience the National Church



“Guide my feet, while I run this race. Guide my feet, while I run this race,” sang 47 Members in

Discernment gathered in worship for the Eastern Regional Member in Discernment Retreat at the headquarters of the United Church of Christ in Cleveland, OH. The words to this classic Christian spiritual beautifully captured the spirit of the conference, which spanned three days this past March 26 – 28 and drew Members in Discernment from conferences located down the entire East Coast of the United States, including the Southeast Conference. Chief among the goals for the conference was to give Members in Discernment, the UCC's name for those who are discerning a call to ministry in the United Church of Christ, an opportunity to connect to one another, to the United Church of Christ's national setting, and to God as they continue the process that will lead many of them into the pulpits of UCC churches across the country.

Attending from the Southeast Conference were Anna Flowers, James Bowman Harris, Michelle Holtman, Amber Kirkendoll and Rev. Kirk Lyman-Barner, who serves on the SECUCC's Members in Discernment Committee, the body which oversees the MID process for all candidates within the Southeast Conference. "The entire event was wonderful and very educational for me as a former MID and current Member of the SECUCC Members in Discernment Committee," writes Lyman-Barner. "We have a wonderful new MID process through the Marks of Effective Ministry." Tonya Barnette agrees, writing, "The conference was a truly life-giving experience for me. From making connections with people at our national church to forming bonds with other Members in Discernment, I felt relationship growing all around. I loved seeing our Church House and worshiping in the Amistad Chapel; learning from the MESA team and sharing MID wisdom; and breaking bread together at our meals and in communion with God through Christ. It was also inspiring to learn about all the connections to justice work opportunities that the UCC continues to help us make."

Programming for the conference included worship, shared meals, presentations from Rev. Geoffrey Black, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ; Rev. Holly Millershank, Team Leader of Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA); and Rev. Kathy Clark, Minister for Members in Discernment. "It was a blessing to share in workshops, wisdom circles, worship, and meals with other MID's from the Eastern Region," writes James Bowman Harris, "this event was truly a community building experience." The community gathered for discussion sessions on topics including church planting, diversity training, the post-seminary pre-call gap, and how to talk seriously about sin within progressive congregations. "Rev. Geoffrey Black emphasized the covenant in his discussion and reminded the group that through this covenant, we are called to serve the institution of the church through committee work and other opportunities for service," writes Rev. Lyman-Barner. "I encourage all pastors in our conference to remember our covenant and challenge them to serve the Church when someone taps them on their shoulders. We have talented and inspiring new leaders. They deserve our support."

The United Church of Christ hosts these Member in Discernment gatherings once each year on a rotating basis for the Eastern, Midwestern, and Western conferences. So effectively, each region gathers

their MIDs for this all-expense-paid opportunity every three years. Members in Discernment are allowed only one chance to attend. “I had an amazing experience,” writes Anna Flowers, “while we are only allowed to attend this gathering once in our discernment process, I look forward to staying connected to the national setting of the United Church of Christ and all my future colleagues throughout my career. We have already connected to one another through Facebook and other social media outlets and I have no doubt that this community of MIDs and support system that we are growing will continue to inspire and sustain us in ministry for years to come.”

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